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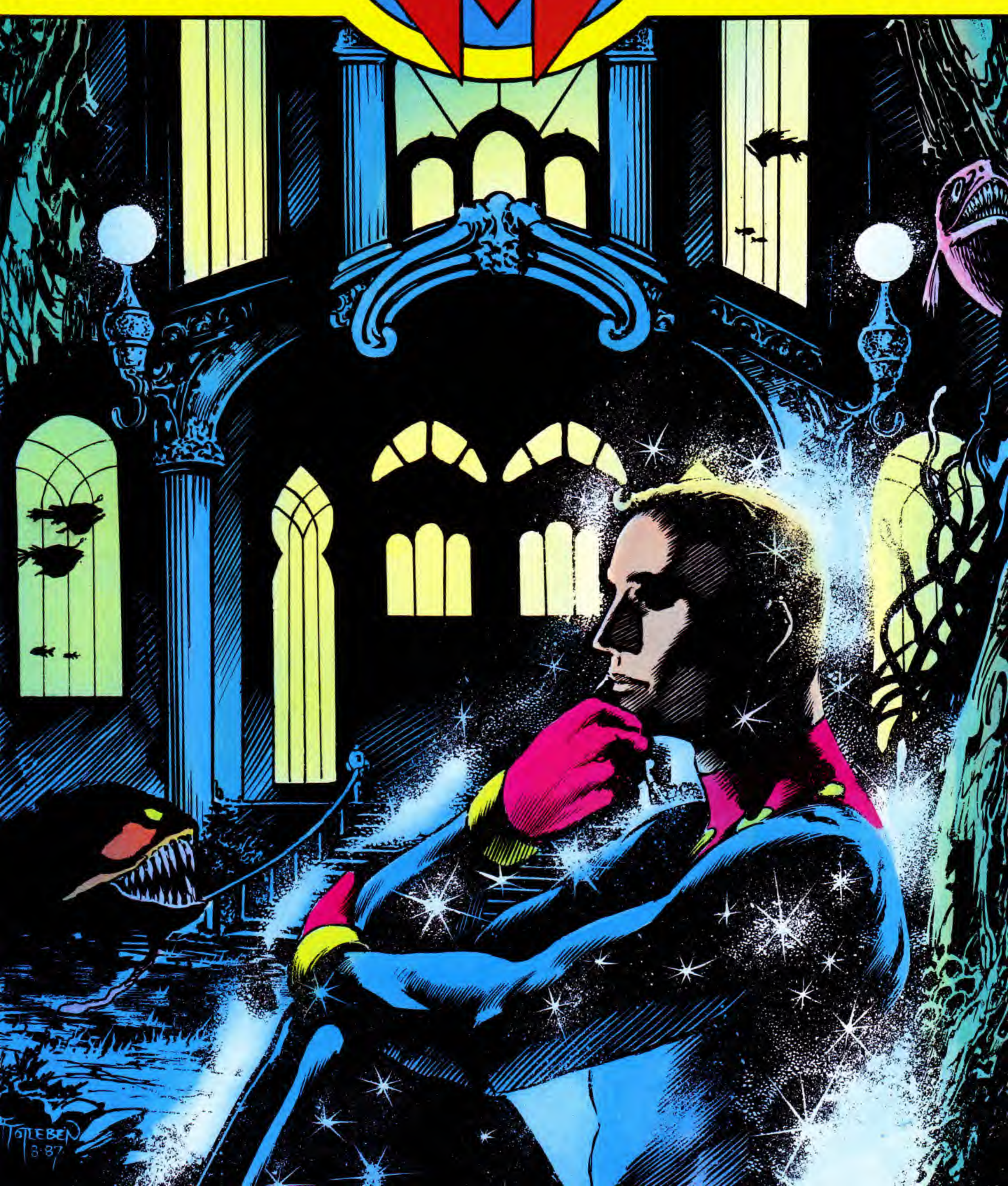


"DANCING ON MY OWN:

"MY BODY SETS, NO LONGER FLUID, HARDENS TO A POSE, AND ALL MY LIFE IS WRIT BETWEEN ITS LINES.

"ACROSS THE YEARS, EACH BLOW AND EACH EMBRACE HAVE LEFT THEIR SUBTLE MARK... A TIGHTENING OF THE MUSCLES HERE, A CERTAIN LAXNESS THERE...

"MY HISTORY IS LOCKED WITHIN THE STILL LIFE OF MY COILED FLESH, AND IF I **MOVE**, IT ALL COMES SPILLING OUT.

"THEN, CAREFULLY, LIKE AN OLD NEWSPAPER CLIPPING, I UNFOLD MYSELF, AWARENESS SHARPENED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT I AM **OBSERVED**.

"THE DEITIES OF DEATH AND LOVE, OF QUICKSILVER AND FIRE, LOOK ON. WE VIEW EACH OTHER, THOUGH REMOTE, THROUGH WINDOWS WARPED INTO THE AIR. THEIR FACES HANG AGAINST THE DARK, THE SIZE DEPENDENT ON THEIR DISTANCE FROM THE IMAGE-APERTURE.

"A MUSCLE TREMBLES IN MY THIGH. MY BOOT SQUEAKS ON THE POLISHED FLOOR. SLOWLY, I RISE, BEGIN TO TURN...

"I'M DANCING. DANCING ON MY OWN.

"ONLY THE GODS ARE WATCHING.

MIRACLEMAN

BOOK III
Chapter Four

OLYMPUS

"MY PAST FLOWS FROM ME IN A TIDE OF MOVEMENTS, GESTURES, MIMED EVENTS, LONG YEARS COMPRESSED INTO A SINGLE INCLINATION OF MY CHIN.

WINTER? YOU CAN **SPEAK?**

FATHER, I COULD **SPEAK** THE DAY I WAS **BORN**, BUT REALISED IT WOULD UPSET **MOTHER**.

I'VE BEEN **CALMING** HER, MANIPULATING HER **MOODS**, BUT **LATELY** SHE'S REACTED **BADLY**. IT'S BECOMING A **PROBLEM**.

ALTER **MOODS**? HOW CAN YOU DO **THAT**? **I** CAN'T DO THAT.

YOU'VE NEVER **TRIED** REALLY, YOU'RE TOO **UNADVENTUROUS**. YOU SHOULD FOLLOW **MIRACLEWOMAN'S** EXAMPLE.

=hmmph= LEGS STILL TOO WEAK. I'D BEST TAKE THE **WEIGHT** OFF THEM...

WAIT! THIS IS **CRAZY**... YOUR **VOCABULARY**, YOUR **PHRASEOLOGY**... WHERE DID YOU **GET** THEM?

YOUR MIND, **MOTHER'S** MIND, EVEN **GARGUNZA'S**... THUS I ALSO SPEAK **GERMAN** AND **SPANISH**.

AHH. THAT'S BETTER. THE CRIB IS DREADFULLY DULL.

THEN... LIZ'S **BEHAVIOUR**, THE WAY SHE CHOSE YOUR **NAME**...

I CHOSE MY **OWN** NAME AND **RELAYED** IT TO HER. "WINTER." IT'S PRETTY, ISN'T IT?

YOU SHOULD OIL THIS WINDOW. IT'S HARD TO OPEN WITHOUT TOUCHING.

WHAT?

WAIT! YOU CAN'T GO OUT **THERE!** WHAT IF SOMEBODY **SEES?**

NOBODY WILL SEE **ANYTHING**. I DON'T **WANT** THEM TO SEE.

HONESTLY, FATHER, YOU SHOULDN'T **WORRY** ABOUT THEM SO MUCH. THEY'RE ONLY **PEOPLE**.

"MY ARMS ENCIRCLE EMPTY SPACE, AS IF TO CRADLE SOMETHING GONE. I THINK OF 1982, A CHILD'S VOICE IN A SILENT ROOM:

"'FATHER? I THINK IT'S TIME WE DISCUSSED MOTHER, DON'T YOU?'

"MY CHILD'S VOICE."

BUT... WHERE ARE YOU **GOING?**

JUST TO TAKE THE BREEZE. I'LL RETURN TO MY CRIB LONG BEFORE MOTHER'S BACK FROM **YARMOUTH**.

WE'LL JUST SEE HOW SHE **DEVELOPS**. MORE INTERFERENCE WITH HER **MIND** COULD **DAMAGE** IT.

BUT... I DON'T SEE HOW SHE'LL **EVER** ACCEPT THE **REALITY** OF THE SITUATION. YOU'RE BARELY SIX WEEKS **OLD** AND YOU'RE **ALREADY** MORE ADVANCED THAN SHE...

FATHER, I'M ALREADY MORE ADVANCED THAN **YOU**. THAT MIGHT CAUSE **PROBLEMS** LATER. I MIGHT HAVE TO GO **AWAY** SOMEWHERE.

AWAY?

OH, LET'S NOT WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW. I WANT TO LOOK AT **LONDON** FOR A WHILE.

WINTER, THIS... THIS IS ALL SO **FAST**.

I MEAN, I'M TALKING TO MY OWN **CHILD**, AND I'M JUST **BABBLING**. I'M NOT SAYING ANYTHING **IMPORTANT** TO YOU. I...

...I LOVE YOU, WINTER.

I KNOW.

"'I KNOW'. NOT 'DO YOU REALLY?' OR 'I LOVE YOU, TOO'...

"'I KNOW.'

"I'M DANCING, TURNING LIKE A WORLD. MY BODY MOVES FROM SPACE TO SPACE; MY MIND FROM TIME TO TIME...

"...LIZ CALLED TO SAY SHE WASN'T COMING HOME YET; THAT SHE LOVED ME; THAT SHE WAS CONFUSED.

"AS WE GREW DISTANT, WORLDS ELSEWHERE DREW CLOSER. JOINING AVRIL, I'D ARRANGED TO MEET THE WARPSMITHS IN THEIR HOUSE BEHIND EARTH'S MOON. I LEFT WINTER READING, ALONE...

"...IT'S NOT AS IF SHE NEEDED ME.

"I MET WITH AVRIL IN DEEP SPACE, HER COSTUME BRIGHT AGAINST THE MILKY WAY'S PEARLY BLUR, AND WAS SURPRISED AT HOW MUCH IT EXCITED ME TO MEET WITH HER AGAIN.

"BEHIND THE MOON WE FOUND A WORLD OF CRYSTAL SHOT WITH STEEL, ALIGHTING ON A YAWNING AIRLOCK'S RIM.

"AS LIGHT AND ATMOSPHERE SPILLED THROUGH THE INNER DOOR, WE SAW THE WARPSMITHS COME TO GREET US: TALL PHON MOODA, GLOWERING AZA CHORN...

"...SINCE LAST WE'D MET THEY'D MASTERED ENGLISH, PERFECT B.B.C. PRONUNCIATION THAT SEEMED QUITE INCONGRUOUS AMONGST THE OTHERWORLDLY HALLS THEY LED US THROUGH.

"IT SEEMED, BEYOND OUR WORLD, THERE WAS A COSMOS FILLED WITH FABLE, WHERE THE QYS WERE DRAGONS, AND THE WARPSMITHS SORCERERS..."

MY GOD. WHAT'S THAT?

A HOLOGRAM, PROJECTED ON A CONTOURED BASE THAT SHOWS TERRESTRIAL EVENTS AS THEY OCCUR. IF YOU DESIRE, WE'LL STROLL ACROSS IT WHILE WE TALK.

CAREFUL...THE SPIN IS FASTER THAN IT **LOOKS**...

WITH PRACTICE, ONE BECOMES ACCUSTOMED TO THE MOTION, THE EXPERIENCE OUTWEIGHING THE DISCOMFORT THAT'S INVOLVED.

YOUR WORLD'S A FASCINATING PLACE. ENJOY THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SEE IT AND REMEMBER IT AS IT IS NOW.

WHY? WILL IT CHANGE?

INVARIABLY. IT'S THE LAW OF EXTRAORDINARY BEINGS: INTRODUCE ONE TO A CULTURE AND THERE'LL SOON BE **DOZENS.** I HAVE SEEN IT PROVEN ON A DOZEN DIFFERENT WORLDS.

YOU'LL NOTICE THERE'RE **ALREADY** FOUR OF US.

THEN WE'VE SOMEHOW CAUSED **OTHER** SUPERHUMANS TO OCCUR?

NOT YOU: THE **FIREDRAKE** THAT THE **QYS** WERE SEEKING WHEN THEY CRASHED, WHICH MADE **YOU** POSSIBLE AND BROUGHT **US** HERE.

IF THERE ARE ANY **OTHER** SUPERHUMANS HERE ON EARTH, THE **GATHERING** WILL BRING THEM WITHIN REACH.

"**THE GATHERING**"? WHAT'S **THAT?**

IT'S **STANDARD PRACTICE** WITH NEW WORLDS TO SEEK OUT THEIR EXISTING **TALENT** AND **ASSEMBLE** IT. BETTER SUCH CREATURES BECOME **FRIENDS** THAN TURN **AGAINST** US WHEN OUR PRESENCE BECOMES KNOWN.

YOUR WORLD ENTERS A NEW AND GLORIOUS AGE. WE MUST **ALL** WORK AS ONE TO EASE ITS **TRANSFORMATION.** THE **CHANGE** IS WORTH THE **EFFORT,** BE **ASSURED.**

INDEED, YOU'LL HARDLY **RECOGNIZE** THE PLACE.

"THE WARPSMITHS' SCAN OF EARTH LOCATED ONLY **TWO** 'EXTRAORDINARY BEINGS.'

"ONE WAS **BIG BEN**, WHO'D GONE UNDETECTED BY THE QYS. THE WARPSMITHS THEORIZED THAT HE MIGHT ONLY HAVE ONE **BODY**, SO THAT HIS EXISTENCE LEFT NO TELLTALE SIGN IN **INFRASPACE**. IT MATTERED **LITTLE**: HE WAS **MAD**; NO USE UNTIL A **CURE** WAS FOUND.

"THE **OTHER** WAS A **FIREDRAKE**.

"(DANCING ALONE, A SENSE OF SOMETHING CRUEL AND BRIGHT PERVADES MY STEPS, WARMING THEIR PACE...)

"APPARENTLY, THE **FIREDRAKE GENE** OCCURRED WHEN CULTURES NEEDED FIRE, PRODUCING FREAKS THAT CONJURED FLAME. WITH FIRE ESTABLISHED, IT BECAME **RECESSIVE**, ALTHOUGH **THROWBACKS** WOULD OCCUR, WITH SKILLS BEYOND THEIR **COMPREHENSION** OR **CONTROL**.

"SOME WERE CONDEMNED AS **ARSONISTS**, OTHERS **SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUSTED**. ONLY **RARELY** WOULD A **POWERFUL** FIREDRAKE STRAIN EMERGE...

"...LIKE **HUEY MOON**, INHABITING HIS PHILADELPHIA JUNKYARD, A REFUGE HE COULDN'T **BURN**.

"(LIKE AUTUMN SPARKS I TURN, THE MUSIC IN MY HEAD SUDDENLY **FASTER**, FULL OF METAL-SCRAP **PERCUSSION**..)

"MOON'S POWERS HAD **ALIENATED** HIM. IN AN ABANDONED CAR HE LIVED IN **RAGS**, SINCE ALL HIS **CLOTHING** WOULD INEVITABLY **BURN**.

"AMONGST THE RED-EYED DOGS WE FOUND HIM, PICKING THROUGH A STEAMING HOT T.V. DINNER, NO MICROWAVE IN SIGHT.

"WHEN WE INVITED HIM TO JOIN US, THE RELUCTANCE HE DISPLAYED DID NOT DETER US **LONG**.

"(I'M DANCING, DANCING LIKE THE HIGHLIGHTS IN A PYROMANIAC'S EYES...)

"PHON **MOODA** TOLD OF FIREDRAKES WHO HAD TURNED SUNS **NOVA**, DEVASTATED **WORLDS**, EXPLAINING WHY THE **QYS** SHOULD SEEK THEM OUT SO DOGGEDLY.

"THOUGH TERRIFIED WHEN WARPED ABOARD OUR **CRAFT**, EVENTUALLY HE UNDERSTOOD WE MEANT NO **HARM**.

"THE OFFER OF **ELECTION** TO OUR RANKS, WHILE FRIGHTENING AND NEW, WAS **IRRESISTIBLE** AFTER THE **WILDERNESS** HE'D **KNOWN**. HE WOULD HAVE **COMPANY**; A STELLAR PALACE FOR A HOME; A ROLE IN MANKIND'S FUTURE UNSURPASSED BY **POPES** OR **PRESIDENTS**.

"THUS DID **APOLLO**, FIRE OF HEAVEN, COME INTO OUR MIDST.

"(I'M SPINNING, TURNING LIKE A CATHERINE WHEEL; A MOTH ABOUT A FLAME...)

"**MOON'S** TALENTS, HAPPILY, WERE LESS **EXTREME**. IMMUNE TO FIRE HIMSELF, HE COULD CAUSE ANYTHING IN RANGE TO INSTANTLY IGNITE, SOMETIMES **EXPLOSIVELY**.

"HE DEMONSTRATED WITH **MAHOGANY**, A ONE-TON BLOCK OF IT. WE WATCHED WITH **INTEREST**...

"(WILD, EXULTANT, I BURST UPWARDS LIKE A JET OF LAVA, LIKE A PILLAR MADE OF FIRE.)

"...AND THEN, ACROSS ITS ASHES WE LINKED HANDS, AND FIRST CONVENED OUR GLORIOUS **PANTHEON**.

"(I DANCE: THAT BURNING JOY; THE FEELING THAT THE WORLD WAS SAFE WITHIN OUR SECRET CARE; THE OPTIMISM BLAZING IN OUR HEARTS THAT I FELT **THEN** IS WITH ME **NOW**, A **PHOENIX** RISING UP, TOO BRIGHT AND HOT AND BEAUTIFUL TO LIVE.)

"THAT OPTIMISM DIED IN '83.

"LIZ, HOME FROM YARMOUTH, SEEMED NO HAPPIER. SHE COULD NOT CARE FOR WINTER, OR MAKE LOVE, OR TALK ABOUT HER MISERY.

"MY DAUGHTER TOO, WHEN WE WOULD TALK, SEEMED RESTLESS; HUNGRY FOR A THING I COULD NOT GIVE. THUS, STORM CLOUDS GATHERED AND, AFRAID, I WAITED, THOUGH NOT LONG.

"THE TEMPO DROPS, ASSUMES A MORE FUNEREAL PACE, FULL OF LOSS AND LONELINESS. I'M DANCING. DANCING ON MY OWN."

...AND SO THAT'S HOW IT IS.

I FEEL HORRIBLE DOING THIS, MIKE. HORRIBLE. IT'S LIKE I'M PULLING EVERYTHING **APART**, MY WHOLE **LIFE**, BUT IF I **STAY** HERE...

...WELL, IF I STAY HERE, I SHALL GO MAD.

I USED TO THINK IF WE SPLIT UP, IT'D BE... I DUNNO, YOU'D STOP FANCYING ME, FIND SOMEONE ELSE, SOMETHING LIKE THAT, BUT **THIS**...

...IT'S A **NIGHTMARE**. IT'S...

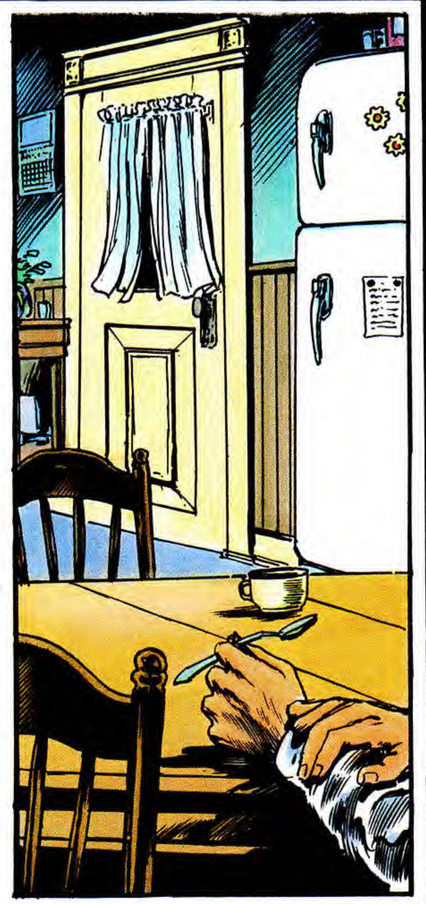
...SHIT, I'M SORRY. I WASN'T GOING TO CRY.

IT'S JUST, I DON'T **BELONG** HERE ANY MORE, WITH YOU AND WINTER. YOU'RE **BEYOND** ME.

EVEN SLEEPING WITH YOU, IT FEELS **WRONG**, LIKE **BESTIALITY**. LIKE I'M AN **ANIMAL** AND YOU'RE...OH, I DON'T KNOW...A HIGHER **SPECIES**.

LOOK, I... I BETTER GO. MY TRAIN'S AT FOUR. I'LL BE IN TOUCH. I'LL WRITE SOME TIME, AND...

...AND I'M SORRY, MIKE. I'M SORRY FOR US ALL.



...AND SO THAT'S WHAT I PLAN TO DO.

I DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE WHILE **MOTHER** WAS STILL HERE. IT WOULD HAVE COMPLICATED THINGS, BUT **NOW**...

...WELL, LET'S JUST SAY IT SEEMS TO BE THE OBVIOUS **MOVE**.

DON'T TAKE IT **PERSONALLY**. THE TIME I'VE SPENT WITH YOU HAS BEEN A **HAPPY** ONE. I **LIKE** YOU, FATHER. LIKE YOU VERY **MUCH**...

...BUT YOU CAN'T TEACH ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW.

THE **QYS**, CONVERSELY, HAVE USED VARIOUS SUPERHUMAN FORMS FOR **CENTURIES**. THEIR INSIGHTS WILL PROVIDE THE EDUCATION I REQUIRE.

IF **LIGHTSPEED** IS **SURPASSABLE**, I SHOULD BE THERE WITHIN THE **YEAR**. IF **NOT**...WELL, THEN, IT MAY TAKE SLIGHTLY **LONGER**.

SOMEDAY, WHEN I'M **BACK**, I'LL TEACH YOU ALL THE THINGS I'VE **LEARNED**. UNTIL THEN, KEEP YOURSELF IN **HEALTH**...

...AND FATHER, DO NOT LOOK SO **SAD**.

IT'S SUCH A LOVELY UNIVERSE.

"BY APRIL, 1983, MY WIFE AND CHILD WERE GONE.

"THOUGH **I** ADJUSTED, MIKE MORAN COULD **NOT**. PACKING A BAG HE HITCHED TO **SCOTLAND**, FINALLY ARRIVING LATE ONE AFTERNOON AMONGST THE MOUNTAINS OF **GLENCOE**. HE DID NOT PITCH HIS TENT. HE JUST BEGAN TO **CLIMB**...

"...MY DANCE GROWS WEARY, ECHOING HIS SOLITARY ASCENT. IT IS THE DANCE OF CRIPPLED BIRDS, OF BERGMAN FILMS AND BROWN-SKINNED CHILDREN HOLDING SUGAR SKULLS.

"IT IS THE DANCE OF DEATH."

KIMOTA.

MICHAEL JOSEPH MORAN 1942-1983

REST IN PEACE

"THE CURIOUS SUICIDE WAS **UNDERSTANDABLE**: HE'D TIRED OF MARVELS; OF THEIR COST IN HUMAN WARMTH. HIS WISH WAS FOR **OBLIVION**. RESPECTING IT, I'VE NOT PRONOUNCED MY WORD OF TRANSFORMATION SINCE THAT NIGHT.

"GONE: WINTER; LIZ; THE MAN I'D BEEN. WITHDRAWING FROM THE LOSS, I FELT A NEED FOR **SOLITUDE**.

"A NEED FOR **SILENCE**.

"HERE THE DANCE GROWS STILL, AS IF AT LAST AFRAID OF WHERE ITS STEPS MIGHT LEAD.

"'SILENCE'

"I CHOSE THE NAME AS CAREFULLY AS I CHOSE THE **SITE**: DOWN IN THE **MARIANAS TRENCH**, **CHALLENGER DEEPS**, ITS DEEPEST POINT.

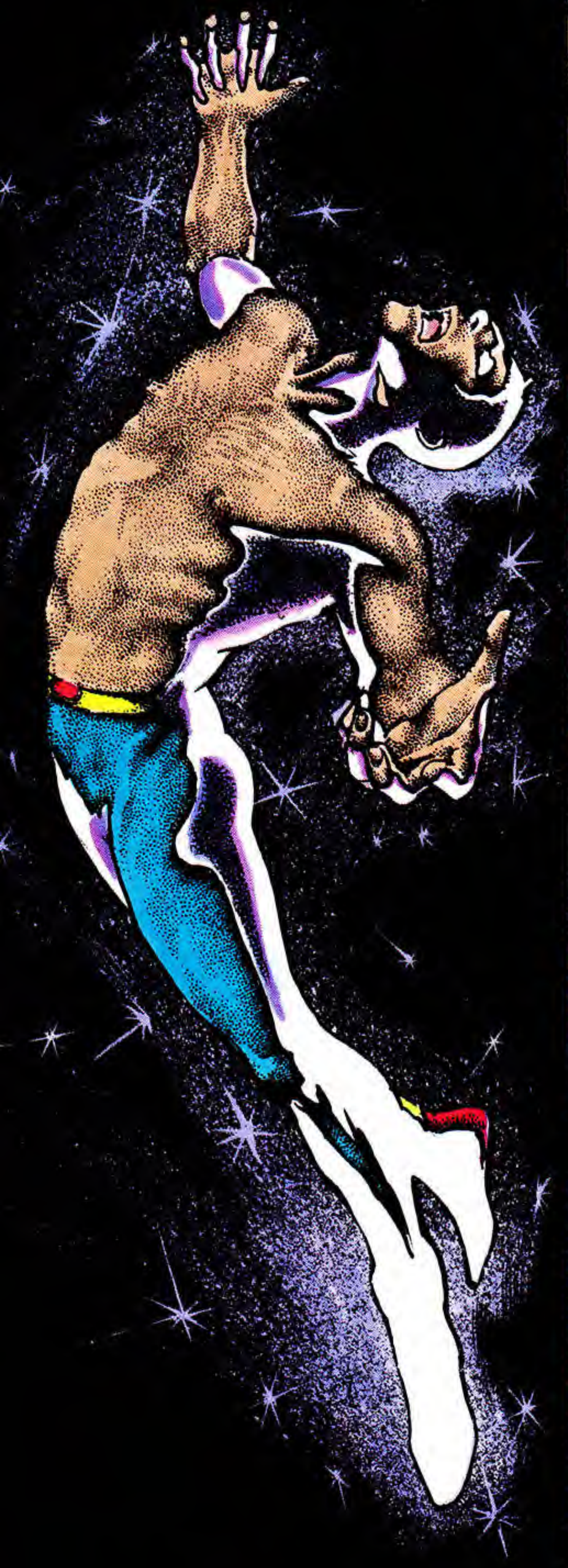
"I CARVED MY HOME FROM ROCKS THAT HAD FOREVER BEEN UNTOUCHED BY LIGHT, DOWN WHERE STRANGE FISHES, PAPER-THIN, SURVIVED IN PRESSURES THAT CRUSHED EVEN THEIR MOST THICKLY-ARMORED KIN.

"SAVE FOR THESE SIGHTLESS SHOALS I WORKED ALONE, AND BUILT MY HOUSE AND NAMED IT **SILENCE**, KNOWING EVEN THEN, PERHAPS, THAT IT COULD NOT ENDURE FOR LONG AS MY REFUGE...

"...FOR SILENCE NEVER **LASTS**.

"THE FINAL MOVEMENT STARTS WITH AN UNNERVING SUDDENESS; WITH VIOLENCE IN MY EVERY MOVE; WITH PANIC IN MY EYES.

"IN 1985, WE WENT TO HELL AND LEARNED THE **COST** OF **PARADISE**.



"IN 1985, THE CHILD WAS WEEPING IN A ROOM THAT STANK OF STEAM AND PEOPLE'S FEET. HE HAD ENDURED SO **MUCH**, COULD NOT BE BLAMED FOR WHAT HE **DID**. I HAD **ABANDONED** HIM. THE FAULT WAS MINE. ALL MINE.

"IN 1985..."

LOOKADIM **CRYIN'**! WOTCHA **CRYIN'** FOR, YER LITTUL **POOF**? **THAT** DIDDUN URT.

ENT **LIKE** A **PROPER** BLOKE, IZZY? MORE LIKE A SKINNY LITTUL **TART**.

YEAH.

YEAH, A'SSRIGHT. JUSS LIKE A **TART**.

I FINK I'LL **GIVE** 'IM ONE.

NAR! C'MON, YOU MENTAL BLEEDER, **LEAVE** 'IM.

LOOK WADDAPPUND **LARST** YEAR; WHEN YOU SHAGGED THAT KID...

SHATCHAFAKKINOLE AND WOTCH THE DOOR.

GOO ON, PETE. TURN 'IM OVER.

WHAT...?

...WHAT ARE YOU **DOING** TO ME? **STOP** IT! **STOP IT!**

THERE...

AAAAAAAA!

OH, **NOOOOO**. OH **PLEASE**, DON'T. I CAN'T **TAKE** THIS. YOU DON'T **UNDERSTAND**!

I **CAN'T**!

YOU **LOVE** IT, YOU LITTUL POOF. **SAY** YOU LOVE IT.

I...

...I'M **SORRY**. I'M SO SORRY.

MIRACLEMAN.

WOSSAPPENIN?

WOSSAPPENIN, I CAN'T SEE.

OH MUM, I CAN'T SEE...

AA AA AA

OOZAT? LEGGO! LEGGO, Y'BASTARD!

STEVE?

STEVE, IZZAT YOU?

AA AA AA AA

NO.

AA AA AA AA

NOT STEVE.

OUR...

...OUR FATHER, WH-WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN...

AA AA AA

...GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US...

AA AA AA

...AND LEAD...AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, B-BUT DELIVER US...

...DELIVER US FROM ALL...

...ALL...

AA AA AA

EEEEEIIIIIGH!

MY GOD, WHAT'S GOING ON? WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE?

JUST YOU CUT THAT NOISE OUT THIS...

AA AA AA

...INSTANT...

nhuhhh... I...I...

hm.

DO YOU KNOW, YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE WHO WAS KIND TO ME?

THE ONLY ONE.

I THINK I'LL LET YOU LIVE.

huhh. hhuhhhh-hhh...

...OH, GOD. OH, GOD, THANK YOU.

THANK YOU.

I'M SORRY.

THEY'D SAY I WAS GOING SOFT, WOULDN'T THEY?

"I DANCE.

"I DANCE **ATROCITY**, **MURDERS**, **TORSOS**, PIERCED **HEADS**. I DANCE THE BURNING **CHILDREN** AND THE LOWING OF THE TORTURED **MEN**. I DANCE THE WHITE-HOT LONDON **SKY**, THE BLOODY, CORPSE-CHOKED **THAMES**, DANCING UNTIL I DROP, AS IF TO DANCE WAS TO BE DONE WITH **GUILT** AND **MEMORIES**; TO NEVER HEAR AGAIN THAT HATED, TERRIFYING NAME:

"BATES.

"HORROR'S BASTARD, PIMP OF CHARNEL HOUSES...

"...BATES GOT OUT.

"THE DANCE CONCLUDES. THE WAN, TRANSLUCENT FACES OF THE AUDIENCE TURN AWAY, CONCEALING SHAME, CONCEALING GRIEF, BEFORE THEIR IMAGES WINK OUT, AND THEY ARE GONE, AND I AM **WEEPING**...

"...WEEPING ON MY **OWN**."

TO BE CONTINUED

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